

Summary: First Americans

People Arrive in the Americas

Thousands of years ago, thick ice covered almost half of the world. Many scientists think the first people came to the Americas by crossing a land bridge between Asia and North America. The land bridge formed when part of the ocean floor between Alaska and Asia turned into grass-covered land. We call this land bridge Beringia. Scientists think people followed migrating animals across it. Other groups may have traveled to the Americas by sea. The migration over land stopped about 10,000 years ago when the ice began to melt.

The seas rose, covering Beringia. About 9,000 years ago, people began to use agriculture. Some people stopped migrating and began to farm. Others continued to follow and hunt animal herds. By 1500, American Indian groups lived in every region of the continent.

North America in 1500

Over time, American Indian groups in different areas created their own cultures. Their environment affected the type of culture they created. The Kiowa traveled across the grasslands of the Western Great Plains. They hunted buffalo for food, shelter, and clothing.

In the Southeast, the weather and soil was good for farming. American Indians, such as the Cherokee, grew corn, beans, and squash. Most of them lived in villages near the crops. They also hunted and gathered food from forests and rivers.

In the Pacific Northwest, the region included the sea and forests. American Indians, such as the Chinook, hunted and fished. They also gathered food. They built homes and canoes with wood.

In the Southwest, the land was dry with few trees. Southwest Indians, such as the Navajo, learned to farm and live with very little water. They built homes using clay and stones. All American Indian cultures had spiritual beliefs and ceremonies in which nature was important.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

migration *noun*, movement from one region to another

agriculture *noun*, farming

culture *noun*, the way of life that people create for themselves and pass on to their children



After You Read

REVIEW What was

Beringia?

Circle the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW How did the

environment of the Southwest affect the lives of American Indians there?

Draw a box around two sentences that tell how the Southwest Indians lived.